



דבורת אמת



A WEEKLY BRANDEIS ORTHODOX ORGANIZATION PUBLICATION
3 SHEVAT 5772 / 27 JANUARY 2012 VOL. XIII ISSUE 11

P A R A S H A T B O

Candle Lighting:	4:33 pm
Tzeit haKochavim:	5:36 pm
Hillel Dinner:	6:00 pm
Shacharit:	9:00 am
Sof Zman Kriat Shema:	9:30 am
Sof Zman Tefilla:	10:19 am
Chatzot:	11:58 am
Mincha:	4:15 pm
Shkia:	4:53 pm
Motzei Shabbat:	5:38 pm

Tefilin

By Rabbi Kaplowitz '02

Parshat Bo concludes with the first two paragraphs found in the tefilin – “kadesh li kol bechor” (Exodus 1:10) and “ve-haya ki yiviecha” (13:11-16). These two parshiot describe the holiness of the firstborn (humans and animals), some aspect of the holiday of Pesach, and the mitzvah of tefilin. In both paragraphs there is an explicit connection made between the Tefilin and the Exodus from Egypt. Thus in 13:9 we read: “And it shall be for a sign unto thee upon thy hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the law of HaShem may be in thy mouth; for with a strong hand hath HaShem brought thee out of Egypt.” We similarly read in the second paragraph: “And it shall be for a sign upon thy hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes; for by strength of hand HaShem brought us forth out of Egypt” (13:16).

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein offers an interesting observation about the seeming redundancy of these two lines. He explains that both verses begin with the individual. But in the first paragraph, the tefilin serve as a reminder to the individual that Hashem took him out of Egypt – ki be-yad chazakah hotzi'acha Hash-

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued on Page 2)

Every Cloud has a Godly Lining

By Sarah Jaffe '15

Nechama Leibowitz, on her commentary of the parsha opens up with an interesting question: Why does our parsha start piling on all of these mitzvot all of a sudden? The whole Torah until now included only three mitzvot and was mainly just stories and narratives. (Even these were all mitzvot directly related to the narrative of the story.)

The Sefer Ha'chinuch attempts to answer this in his commentary on the mitzva to be careful not to break any bones of the Korban Pesach. He explains that this is our first time being G-d's chosen people, and we have to commemorate it appropriately. But wouldn't just doing this to commemorate it be enough - why are there so many laws and details, one might ask. He answers that actions are what shape/define the kind of person that we are, not merely the intentions. You can be a person who is always thinking evil thoughts, but if you do good deeds all the time, you are actually becoming a good person. The opposite is also true. If you try to be a nice and good person, but

(Sarah Jaffe continued on Page 2)

Parsha in a Box

- The eighth plague of arbeh, locusts
- The ninth plague of choshech, darkness
- Pharaoh almost lets Bnei Yisrael go, and then doesn't
- Hashem tells about makat bechorot, the plague of the firstborn
- We get our first mitzvah as a big nation! Yay Rosh Chodesh!
- Mitzvot of Pesach
- The tenth plague happens
- Pharaoh and Mitzrayim hurry Bnei Yisrael to go serve Hashem
- Hashem takes us out of Mitzrayim!
- We are commanded to remember yitziat Mitzrayim, the Exodus from Egypt
- The mitzvah to give every firstborn male to Hashem
- Tefillin

(Rabbi Kaplowitz continued from Page 1)

em mi-Mitzraim. In the second paragraph the message is directed to the collective – ki be-chozek yad hotzi’anu Hashem mi-Mittraim. Rav Lichtenstein explains that while the tefilin are a sign for the individual they are also a sign for the rest of the world. Through the tefilin we publicize our belief and trust in Hashem. But in order to profess our faith to others we must first internalize the idea for ourselves.

If we are to take this idea farther, we must ask what is the connection between tefilin and the Exodus? What is the message we are meant to gain from the tefilin?

Many commentators offer explanations to this question. The Ramban explains that there is a need for tefilin – and all the other remembrances of the Exodus – because Hashem will not perform miracles and signs in every generation to raise awareness of His providence. Therefore, we must create for ourselves many memorials and signs “all aimed at keeping alive the memory of these miracles, that they should not be forgotten throughout the generations.” Similarly, the Netziv explains that the yearly telling of the Exodus on Pesach is not enough to instill its message and impact. Rather, we require daily reminders of the incident to keep it fresh in our minds and in our hearts.

Rav Shamshon Rephael Hirsch focuses on the placement of the tefilin on the hand or arm. He writes, “It was not our own hand that redeemed us from Egypt but the hand of G-d...The yoke of Egyptian bondage was removed from us, in order to be replaced by the yoke of heaven.” Tefilin are related to the Exodus because the true freedom gained in the Exodus was the freedom to worship Hashem and observe the Torah.

Rav Kook also focuses on G-d’s “strong hand” with which He took us out of Egypt. For Rav Kook, tefilin are a call to us to emulate the ways of Hashem. Just as Hashem took us out of Egypt with a strong hand, we too must use a “strong hand” in our daily battles against impurity and profanity. “The triumph of the sacred over the profane has to be kept up by great effort and a strong hand whose potency would be made manifest by this precept, majestic in the holiness of the letters of the tefilin which embrace the twofold symbols of deed and thought” [as symbolized by the tefilin of the head (thought) and tefilin of the arm (deed)].

Rabbi Kaplowitz paints his toenails

(Sarah Jaffe continued from Page 1)

you engage in sketchy behaviors, then your goodness is out ruled, and you’re actually not all that great of a person. Therefore, Hashem gave us lots of detailed mitzvot in order to give us a lot of opportunities to be good people.

The Rambam agrees and says you do good deeds/ mitzvot in order to improve your good midot, and you must be quick to cut off bad behaviors lest they begin to affect your midot for the worse.

Nechama Leibowitz makes the striking comparison of a Nazi officer during the Holocaust. Even if he just started out as a regular nice guy, after carrying out the evil orders for long enough, it began to turn him into a different type of person. He began to become a sadistic and cruel human being.

She also warns that with this constant attempt to improve ourselves by merely performing good deeds, we can make mitzvot almost routine and they begin to lose their meaning and influence on us. But, on the other hand, if a person is religiously lost, the best thing to help bring them back is to take them through the motions of mitzvot. Because even if certain things seem mundane, they actually have a lasting affect on our midot and on our character.

After all, our Avot on Har Sinai were willing to accept with “na’ase ve’nishma.” They were willing to do the actions of the mitzvot first, even before hearing the reasoning, and perhaps this is because they knew the power of actions.

Sarah Jaffe loves hipster cats

Joanniphfer

By Joan Fleischer ‘12

In Parshat Bo, Hashem gives the Jews the mitzvah of establishing the lunar calendar: “This month shall be for you the beginning of the months, it shall be for you the first of the months of the year” (12:2). Rabbi Twerski points to this as a signifier of the holiness of time. He draws connections from this to the idea of bitul Torah, which means wasting time that could be devoted to Torah learning. If time

(Joan Fleischer continued on Page 3)

(Joan Fleischer continued from Page 2)

is holy, then one should be careful not to waste time. Rabbi Twerski even suggests that “being given additional time is like being given holy books.” In other words, when we realize we have extra time, we should look at it as time to learn.

We can draw connections from this idea back to an earlier place in the parsha. When the plague of darkness overtakes Egypt, the Egyptians are plunged into a darkness that is almost tangible. The Jews, on the other hand, can see and move freely. Rav Shmuel Rozovsky brings from this that Torah can be your stronghold even in the most harrowing situations; a so-called “light in the dark.” This relates to the verse in Mishlei 6:23, “for a commandment is a candle and the Torah is light.” These lines suggest even further that a person should rely on Torah as a good use of time. Torah can act as a protector, providing strength and direction to a person in need.

Further along in the parsha, as Hashem explains the details of Pesach, He says “and you shall guard the matzot” (12:17). While this might be the most literal translation, the Mechilta suggests an alternate reading: the letters mem, tzadee, vav, tav in the word matzot can also be vocalized so the word reads mitzvot. The pasuk would then read, “you shall guard the mitzvot.” The Sages suggest that just as we must guard the matzah to make sure it does not become leavened, so must we be careful not to neglect opportunities we might have to do mitzvot.

Especially in light of our reading of Hashem’s delivering us from Egypt, we should appreciate the miraculous freedom we have to be the Jews that Hashem wants us to be. With these ideas in mind, we should push ourselves further to do mitzvot and absorb ourselves in Torah.

After calculating the gematria of Joan’s name we have concluded that she is an Ashbelite (from the tribe of Benjamin)

Mitzvah of the Week

By Daniel Kasdan ‘13

Source: “Distance yourself from falsehood” (Shemot 23:7).

Even though this pasuk is stated in the context of the Jewish judicial process, it is generally understood to be a directive to all Jews. Indeed, rabbis have cited this verse for centuries to emphasize that—from a Torah perspective—“honesty is the best policy.”

I think it is a fair assumption that the majority of us frown upon harmful or habitual lying. There are even those of us—may G-d bless their souls—who are so makpid on this prohibition that they steer clear of harmless lies. I cannot help but think of a phone call I had with a friend of mine from Brandeis, in which I requested that she “do me a favor” by pretending that she had a time-conflict so as to change the time of a get-together. Shocked by my request, she responded firmly: “DK, I will not lie for you.”

As laudable as situations like this may be, the Torah’s language seems particularly strong. According to Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, our pasuk is the only instance in the entire Torah in which we are commanded to “distance” ourselves from a prohibition. Why is it not enough to merely refrain from lying? Or, more precisely, what exactly is meant by the phrase “distance yourself”?

According to Rav Twerski, the Torah is instructing us to avoid situations which may force us to later tell a lie. In other words, if we are about to begin an activity that will need to be “covered up” at a later date, it may not be the best idea to engage in such an activity in the first place.

Rabbi Joseph Telushkin has a different approach to the pasuk. According to Rav Telushkin, the Torah is cautioning us against using overstatements or exaggerations. While technically not false, such embellishments of the truth can lead to a very slippery slope.

I would like to suggest an alternative explana-

tion. When the Torah tells us to “distance yourself from falsehood,” it is referring to a form of speech which has the potential to create false impressions. Put more simply, the Torah is demanding that we make sure to not misrepresent ourselves, even in situations where no formal lie has been told. A couple examples will help clarify this idea.

Facebook. In addition to being a powerful yetzer hara, the social networking site does have some positive aspects to it, such as publicizing an event. Yet, all too often do we find people who click “maybe attending” when they have no intention of actually attending the event. While its noncommittal nature precludes it from ever being a truly false statement, the “maybe attending” option is nonetheless incredibly misleading. Pretending like you may attend the event will not make the host “feel better;” au contraire, it will eventually cause him or her more distress, for it deceives the host into thinking that you are actually considering the event.

Another form of deception involves omission of key information. Whereas we all agree that excluding a source from a written assignment constitutes plagiarism, many of us see no problem in casually relaying information without properly citing our sources. But in doing so, we enable the listener to falsely deduce that our statement was an original thought. Arguably the best example of this is in delivering a dvar Torah, where we unintentionally pass off a fascinating insight into the parsha as our own. We should therefore keep in mind the words of Rabbi Chanina: “Whoever says something in the name of the one who (initially) said it brings redemption to the world” (Megillah 15a). In this vein, I would like to point out that I was shown this gemara by my rebbe, Rav Shimon Isaacson.

As we reflect upon the mitzvah of honesty, it would do us well to remember the old Yiddish proverb (quoted by Rav Telushkin): “A half-truth is a whole lie.” Have a good shabbos!

Letter From the New Editors

To our dearest readers,

On behalf of the Torat Emet Staff we would like to welcome you back to Brandeis and we would like to extend our greetings as the new co-editors of Torat Emet. We hope you had a wonderful break and hope you continue to have a wonderful semester.

As new co-editors we bring new ideas that we hope will enhance your reading and your overall Shabbat experience. As you may or may not have noticed by now, the last page contains one of our more radical and, hopefully not but possibly, controversial ideas. Included in this week’s Torat Emet is a dvar Torah written in Hebrew. This is something we hope to do periodically. In BOO there are a number of people with solid backgrounds in Hebrew and we hope this will be a good way for them to connect to Torat Emet. With that said we realize that this could be potentially alienating to those who do not have such a background. This is not our intent by any means, nor is it our intent to turn Torat Emet into a Hebrew periodical.

We would like to know what you think. We would like to know specifically about this idea and about your thoughts in general. If you like the Hebrew, please tell us. If you dislike the Hebrew, please tell us. If you have ideas of your own that you think would improve and enhance Torat Emet, please tell us. We are here for you and want nothing but to help make your Shabbat that much sweeter. We are sorry if we offend and are happy if you are happy. With that said, we would like to extend a thank you to Noah Fields for writing this Hebrew dvar Torah.

We would also like to extend a special thanks to Tali Puterman for all her dedication and hard work over the past few semesters, and to Michelle Kaplow, who will be continuing as co-editor with us.

Gut Shabbos, Shabbat Shalom!

Benjamin D. Birkeland, Ora Gold
Co-editors, Torat Emet

פרשת

השבוע מלאה עם המון דברים מעניינים כמו שלושת המכות האחרונות, וכמה מהלכות קרבן פסח. אבל אני רוצה להתמקד על נושא שקשור לפרשת שבוע שעברה — הכבדת לב פרעה. יש המון מפרשים שמסבירים איך ה' יכול להכביד לב פרעה, אבל הם, בדרך כלל, לא משמים לב למילים ושורשי המילים שהתורה משתמש בהם. אני חושב שאנחנו יכולים ללמוד משהו מהמילים והשורשים שהתורה מחליט להשתמש בהם.

בחזרת על הפרשה אנחנו יכולים לראות שרב הזמן שהתורה מספר על 'הכבדת' לב פרעה, היא משתמשת בשורש ח.ז.ק. אבל, בהתחלת פרשת בא התורה משתמשת בשורש כ.ב.ד, "הכבדתי את לבו ואת לב עבדיו" (10:1). יש עוד כמה פעמים שהתורה משתמשת בשורש כ.ב.ד, במקום להשתמש בשורש ח.ז.ק. אז האם באמת יש הבדל בין שימוש באלו שורשים? ואם באמת התורה משתמשת באלו שורשים בצורה מדויקת, אז מה זה יכול ללמד אותנו?

רואים שרב הפעמים שהתורה משתמשת בשורש ח.ז.ק היא נמצאת בבניין נפעל — שהיא פסיבית. וגם רואים שרב הזמן חזקת לב פרעה גורם שהוא מחליט לא לשלוח את בני"י מצריים. בגלל המופתים והמכות, פרעה רוצה לשלוח בני"י מצריים כדי לעצור את המכה. אבל, זה לא באמת מה שהוא רוצה, ולכן הלב שלו נחזק (או על יד עצמו או יד ה') לעשות מה באמת טוב בשבילו ובשביל עבדיו. באמת, שלחות בני"י מצריים (לפחות במכות הראשונות) לא ברצונו. ולכן הוא צריך חזק לבו כדי להתגבר על פחדים שלו ולהחליט לעשות מה שבאמת טוב בשבילו ובשביל מצריים. ואז התורה משתמשת בשורש ח.ז.ק פה בבחינת זריזות — שלפעמים יש לנו דברים קשים לעשות או אנחנו מפחדים ואז חייב לנו להתגבר על עצמנו ולהתחיל (או לסיים) אלו דברים.

למרות שהתורה משתמשת בשורש ח.ז.ק בבחינת זריזות, היא משתמשת בשורש כ.ב.ד בבחינת אחרת. הפעם הראשונה שהתורה משתמשת בשורש כ.ב.ד בנושא הזה בצורת פועל היא במכת ברד. הנה התורה מספרת לנו שעובדי פרעה בקשו מפרעה לשלוח את בני"י (וזה הפעם היחיד שהם בקשו כך). אז, ברור לנו שפה המצרים באמת רוצים לשלוח את בני"י. אבל, ה' מכביד לבם כדי שלא ישלחו את בני"י. וזה מוזר מעוד מפני שה' רוצה להוציא את בני"י מצרים, ואם הוא רצה, הוא היה יכול להוציא אותם אחרי מכת ברד. אבל, ככתוב בתורה יש לה' עוד מטרה — לגלות כוחו וגבורתו במופתים. וכדי להשיג את המטרה הזאת הוא חייב להשאיר את בני"י במצריים לזמן קצר. אבל העיקר פה הוא שה' מחליט לא להוציא בני"י מצריים מפני שהוא מעריך משהו אחר יותר. וזה לא רק נמצא בחשבון ה', אבל גם בחשבון פרעה. במצב הזה הוא יודע שהוא ועבדיו רוצים לשלוח בני"י. אבל, באמת הוא חושב שהוא עדיין יכול למשול עליהם ועל ה', והוא מעריך את האפשרות הזאת יותר מהאפשרות לשלוח בני"י ולכן צריך 'הכבדה' כדי לעבר על האפשרות לשלוח את בני"י. וכל זה בבחינת זהירות — ההתגברות על תאוות להחליט למנוע משהו או לעשות משהו במקום משהו אחר.

אז השימוש בשתי שורשים שונים האלו מגלה לנו שתי ערכים חשובים: זריזות וזהירות. ואנחנו צריכים שניהם. לפעמים אנחנו פוחדים משהו או לא רוצים לעשות משהו, ואז אנחנו צריכים את הכוח והחזיון להתגבר על אלו פחדים. ולפעמים כאשר אנחנו יודעים שיש משהו שאנחנו רוצים לעשות, אבל אנחנו יודעים שהדבר רע בשבילנו, אז אנחנו חייבים להכביד את עצמנו ולהתגבר על התאוה. ובאמת שני הדברים האלו קשורים, שבשניהם נמצאת גבורה והכוונה לעשות את הטוב. ואני מקווה שאנחנו נמצאו את הכוח להתגבר על היצר הרע שלנו ולהיות זריזים וזהירים בעבודת ה'.

(תודה לזאב גאלדיש בשביל עזרה שלו)

Torat Emet Staff:

Co-editors:

Michelle Kaplow '12, Ora Gold '13, and Ben Birkeland '14

Staff Writers: Rabbi Kaplowitz '02,
Eitan Cooper '13, Noah Fields '12,